

StartZone spurs new entrepreneurs, start-ups

Starting a new business can be daunting for seasoned entrepreneurs, but even more challenging for low-income people, underserved minorities, recent immigrants and those with disabilities.

The Highline Community College StartZone program helps south King County residents from a variety of disadvantaged backgrounds start and grow businesses through no-cost training, technical assistance and other business supports. As a result, the program has been recognized as one to watch by a statewide team that reviews best practices in workforce and economic development.

Since its launch in 2008, StartZone has helped clients open 32 new businesses creating 71 new jobs, accessing nearly \$234,000 in business startup and expansion financing. The program is moving out of its own start up phase with a restructured program delivery model that has allowed it to serve more new clients in the first quarter of 2010 than for all of 2009. In August and September of 2010, the program helped launch a bakery in Des Moines, a barbeque restaurant in White Center, a café in Kent, an antique mall in Burien, and a nurse assisting training program in Federal Way.

StartZone combines basic business training and intensive one-to-one business consulting and other business supports to help low-income entrepreneurs overcome barriers and access the knowledge, tools and resources they need to become successful business owners.

Clients who complete a four-week, eight-hour series designed to assess their readiness qualify for a two-hour consulting session with a Microenterprise Development Specialist to determine whether their business goal “pencils out” and, if so, to discuss next steps. Clients who demonstrate the feasibility of their business goals are eligible for one-on-one business consulting. This filtering approach has made more efficient use of staff and has resulted in success rates of clients receiving intensive one-to-one technical assistance of about 40 percent—higher than the standard average of 10 percent.

StartZone’s location on a community college campus with the Highline Small Business Development Center and other business and education resources allows clients to access a continuum of services, ranging from pre-venture to well-established small business.

StartZone is also an approved training program for participants in the Self-Employment Assistance Program through the state’s Employment Security Department. Customers of the state’s Department of Vocational Rehabilitation also participate in the program.



Partners

SW King County Economic Development Initiative
Highline Community College
Highline’s Small Business Development Center
Highline’s Procurement Technical Assistance Center

Referral Partners

African Chamber of Commerce of Pacific Northwest
Airport Jobs
Asian Counseling and Referral Services
Burst for Prosperity
Community Capital Development
Diocese of Olympia JumpStart Fund
Express Advantage
Filipino Chamber of Commerce
Green River Small Business Assistance Center
Kenyan Women Association
Metropolitan Development Council
Multi Service Center
OUR Washington
Para Los Ninos
Washington CASH
Washington Access Fund
Washington Initiative for Supported Employment
White Center Community Development Association

“StartZone can be a major force in bringing new jobs and businesses to South King County despite these tough economic times,”

Dr. Jack Bermingham
Highline Community College

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“A Program to Watch” – the Governor’s Best Practices in Workforce in Economic Development Award Review Committee